

The 40 Committee: America's most clandestine spy group

Sun-Times Bureau

WASHINGTON — The 40 Committee, which played the key role in the U.S. intervention in Chile between 1970 and 1973, is probably the most secret and secretive organization in the U.S. government.

It has evolved over the last 20 years as a clandestine "supreme court" which rules on when and where to set the Central Intelligence Agency loose in supporting and undermining foreign governments.

Technically a subcommittee of the National Security Council, it was first known as the

Special Group or the S4/12 Group, from the secret Order 34/12 under which it was created in the early years of the Eisenhower administration.

Later, after the intelligence apparatus was reorganized in the Kennedy administration following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, it came to be known as the 303 Committee.

Finally, in the Nixon administration it became the 40 Committee.

Its membership has been more or less the same from the beginning — the President's national security adviser as chairman, the

deputy secretary of defense, the undersecretary of state for political affairs and the director of the CIA. Under President Richard M. Nixon, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was added.

During the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the committee met about once a week to consider major covert operations in foreign countries.

During Nixon's first term, intelligence officials say, the 40 Committee became more or less a one-man operation. Kissinger reportedly abandoned the practice of regular group meetings and generally dealt singly with the other members.

To preserve secrecy, the committee has always been served by a small staff, reportedly no more than two or three intelligence specialists.

The committee regularly reports to the President through his national security adviser, but other members of the NSC are understood to be largely excluded.

In fact, a close associate of President Ford said he is convinced Ford was not aware of the committee when he became President.

even though as vice president he had been one of the four statutory members of the NSC, together with the President and the secretaries of state and defense.

Sources close to President Lyndon B. Johnson said he was similarly in the dark during his service as vice president under President John F. Kennedy.

The committee did not exist during the early years of the CIA's existence, evidently because covert operations were viewed as going beyond the law.

The National Security Act of 1947, which defined the duties of the CIA, makes no mention of foreign operations. But it contains a loophole clause permitting the CIA to perform "other functions and duties related to intelligence" at the order of the NSC.

But later that year the NSC, without seeking additional authority from Congress, approved a broad policy of conducting foreign covert operations under the loophole in the law.

At first the NSC as a whole approved operations but eventually delegated the authority to the committee in the mid-1950s.

Reveal Kissinger order on Chile

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Committee, shortly after Allende's overthrow last September, that "the CIA had nothing to do with the coup to the best of my knowledge and belief."

At a background meeting with reporters in Chicago in September, 1970, three months after the 40 Committee approved the Chile operation, Kissinger said, "An Allende take-over in Chile would present massive problems for us, and indeed to the whole Western Hemisphere. . . . We are taking a close look at the situation. It is not one in which our capacity for influence is very great."

The Senate committee's subpanel on multinational corporations, which held hearings last year on the alleged ties between the CIA and the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. in Chile, is looking into possible perjury by other State Department officials.

But Rep. Michael J. Harrington (D-Mass.), who has forced the new revelations, expressed concern that Congress would blunt its inquiries for "fear they'll run into Kissinger. . . . There's a disinclination in Congress to even get into some areas that might per-

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ipentially damage or embarrass Kissinger."

The multinational subcommittee was concentrating on the testimony of Edward M. Korry, ambassador to Chile between 1967 and 1971, and of Charles A. Meyer, former assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs and now an official for Sears Roebuck & Co. in Chicago.

Korry testified, "The United States did not seek to pressure, subvert, influence a single member of the Chilean Congress at any time in the entire four years of my stay. No hard line toward Chile was carried out at any time."

Meyer testified, "We bought no votes, we funded no candidates, we promoted no coups."

U.S. agents were accused of passing out bribe money when the 1970 election was thrown into the Chilean Congress because Allende, though getting the most votes in a three-way race, failed to win a majority.